

The President. You know, let me just say—I'll be very brief, because I know we're supposed to go over to this other deal, and I think Linda's got to go. But I just want to thank you for doing this and for being brave enough to do it.

I knew when we started that all of us would be subject to some criticism because, number one, we couldn't solve every problem in America overnight related to race; number two, you could almost relate every problem in America to race; and number three, in a cynical and weary world, it's easy to devalue the importance of people going in good faith to raise the consciousness and quicken the conscience and kind of lift the spirits of other people and encourage them to do the right thing, and then to figure out—it is a complex thing, figuring out how much of this is policy, how much of this is dialog, how much of this is community, how much of this is almost spiritual.

I think you have really made a heroic effort to come to grips with all of these elements and to make this a very important milestone on America's journey here, and I hope you'll always be proud of it. I really think—you know, it was a big risk. I knew a lot of people would say, "Well, we didn't do this; we didn't do that; we didn't do the other thing;" or "we said this, and it was wrong." And probably some of that criticism is valid. But when you take it all and shake it up, I think there is no question that what we did at this moment, in the absence of a searing crisis, facing a future of incredible kaleidoscopic diversity, was a very good thing for our country. And I do think that we have to keep it going, and I will take all these recommendations seriously.

I hope you all meant what you said today. I hope it was a great gift for you, because for your country it was a great gift.

Chairman Franklin. We are deeply grateful to you, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you. Well, I'll see you over there. Except Linda, who has an excused absence.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:20 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. Other participants in the meeting were Judith A. Winston, Executive Director, and Christopher Edley, consultant, President's Advisory Board on Race. These

remarks were not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue. A tape was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks to the President's Advisory Board on Race

September 18, 1998

Thank you so much. Dr. Franklin, the Advisory Board, to the Members of the Congress who are here: Congresswoman Eddie Bernice Johnson, Congressman Amo Houghton, Congressman Jay Dickey, Congressman Ed Pastor, Congressman Tom Sawyer, and Congressman John Lewis, whose life could be a whole chapter of this report. We thank you for coming. We thank Mayor Archer, Mayor Webb, Mayor Bush, Mayor Flores, Governor Thomas of the Gila River Tribe, and other distinguished Americans who are here today—business, religious, community leaders.

I thank the Attorney General, the Deputy Attorney General, Eric Holder, the Secretary of Education, the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development, the Secretary of Transportation, SBA Administrator Alvarez, Acting Assistant AG Bill Lann Lee—I hope I won't have to say that "acting" forever—[laughter]—our Deputy SBA Administrator Fred Hochberg. Thank you all for being here.

I'm especially gratified by the presence of a large number of Cabinet members, Members of Congress, and local leaders here today. I thank the head of the Council of Economic Advisers, Janet Yellen, for being here. I'll have more to say about that in a moment. Thank you, Rosa Parks, for coming.

I want to say a special word of thanks to all the people who made this board possible: to John Hope Franklin for his wise and patient, but insistent, leadership; Reverend Suzan Johnson Cook; Angela Oh; Bob Thomas; Linda Chavez-Thompson, who was with us in the White House just a moment ago but has what I called an excused absence—[laughter]—my long-time friends and colleagues, the former Governors of Mississippi and New Jersey, Bill Winter and Tom Kean. I thank Laura Harris, who has been a wonderful consultant for us on Native American issues. My good friend Chris Edley, thank you for what you have done. I thank Judy

Winston and the staff of the President's Initiative on Race for the remarkable job they have done, and I'd like to thank the people in the White House who worked with them, but especially Minyon Moore, Maria Echaveste, and before her, Sylvia Mathews. Thank you all so much for what you have done.

Now, some time ago, John Hope Franklin said, "The task of trying to reshape our society to bring about a climate of racial healing is so enormous, it strains the imagination." Well, again I'd say, I'd like to thank John Hope Franklin, the rest of this board, and the staff for straining their imaginations and finding the energy to take on this tremendous task of focusing the Nation's attention on building one America for the new century.

Often, this has meant enduring criticism, some of it perhaps justified, some of it I have questioned, because, as Dr. Franklin said, no one could solve this problem in 15 months since it has not been resolved in all of human history to anyone's complete satisfaction. But they have taken on the endeavor. And it has been a magnificent journey. They have crossed this country, the length and breadth of America. They have seen all different kinds of people.

For them, it has been a journey across our land, a journey across our culture, a journey across our history, and a journey, I imagine, for all of them across their own personal lives and experiences. They've gone from Silicon Valley to Oxford, Mississippi, to the Fairfax County school district across the river here, where there are students from more than 100 different national and ethnic groups, 150 different national and ethnic groups.

We knew that no effort could solve all the challenges before us, but I thank this board because they have helped America to take important steps forward. I also thank Americans—unbelievable numbers of Americans—from all across the country who have participated, all those who wanted to tell their stories and all those who were willing to listen.

They have brought us closer to our one America in the 21st century. Out in the country, they found a nation full of people with common sense, good will, a great hunger to move beyond division to community, to move from the absence of discrimination to the

presence of opportunity to the spirit of genuine reconciliation. This board has raised the consciousness and quickened the conscience of America. They have moved us closer to our ideal, but we have more to do.

I want to say, I am especially proud of the work that every member of our administration has tried to do. When I look out here at the Secretary of Labor, the Attorney General, Secretary Cuomo, Secretary Riley, Secretary Slater, Aida Alvarez, Janet Yellen, all these people who work for me, they know that we care about this, and they have really worked hard to do you proud, and I thank them, too. But we have more to do.

You know, for more than two centuries we have been committed to the ideas of freedom and equality, but much of our history has been defined by our struggle to overcome our steadfast denial of those ideals and, instead, start to live by them. It has been a hard road. It is rooted deeply in our own history, as John Hope Franklin said. Indeed, I believe it is rooted in the deeper impulses that trace their beginnings back to the dawn of human society: the mistrust, the fear, the hatred of those who are the other, those who are them, not us.

In the area of race, it has been a special burden because you can see people who are different from you. And with Native Americans, it's been a special burden because we took land that was once theirs. With African-Americans, it's been a special burden because we all have to confront the accumulated weight of history that comes from one people enslaving another.

But with every area of racial tension, if you strip it all away, you can go back to the dawn of time, when people first began to live in societies and learned they were supposed to mistrust and fear and hate people who were not in their crowd. We see it manifest around the world in our time. We've seen it between the Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, going on for hundreds of years—thank God, I hope, about to end. We've seen it with the Hutus and the Tutsis in Rwanda. We've seen it with the Arabs and the Jews in the Middle East; with the Serbs, the Croats, the Muslims in Bosnia; today, the

Serbs and the Albanians in Kosovo. In America we see it manifest, still, in racial differences but also in religious and political differences, as well.

In whatever manifestation, I think we have to begin with one clear understanding: When we approach others with discrimination and distrust, when we demean them from the beginning, when we believe our power can only come from their subjugation, their weakness, or their destruction, as human beings and as citizens, we pay a terrible price.

Our Founders were pretty smart people. They knew we weren't perfect, but we needed to strive for perfect ideals. And they built us a country based on a Constitution that was literally made for reconciliation, for the honorable and principled resolution of differences, rooted in a simple proposition that God created us all equal.

Now, because they created a freedom of religion, they couldn't write in the Constitution, therefore the first and most important commandment is this, to love your neighbor as yourself. But what they did write in that Constitution is, you are commanded to respect and treat your neighbor as yourself. That's still a pretty good guidepost for what we have to do.

On the eve of a new millennium, our country is more free and equal than ever before, but we have to keep going until everybody has a chance to live out his or her dreams according to his or her capacities and efforts; until everyone has a chance at a good job, a decent house on a safe street, health care and education for their children; and most of all, the chance to be treated with dignity and respect and to reap the full rewards of citizenship; to relish what is different about themselves but respect what is different about others.

We know that gaps still exist in all these areas between the races, and we must work to bridge them. We must bridge the opportunity gaps. We must build an America where discrimination is something you have to look in the history books to find. We have to do a lot of things to achieve that. Let me just try to say what my thoughts are, kind of following up on what Dr. Franklin said.

The first thing we have to do is keep the conversation going. A real gap in perceptions

still exists among the American people. Some believe that this is no longer really an issue, or it's just something that occurs when something terribly outrageous happened, as did in Jasper, Texas. But it's not just that. It's an issue in the back of someone's mind every time a police officer of one race pulls over somebody else of another race. It's an issue in the back of everyone's mind every time a perfectly normal child is put in a remedial class because of the color of his or her skin or the income of their parents.

We should not underestimate the power of dialog and conversation to melt away misunderstanding and to change the human heart. I am proud to say today that the National Conference for Community and Justice, led by Sandy Cloud, who is here, will soon convene a group of religious leaders to continue this work of fostering racial reconciliation. And I thank Sandy for taking on this important job.

The second thing we have to do, again to echo what Dr. Franklin said, is to make sure we have the facts about race in America. A lot of us have strong opinions on the subject; not all of us have the facts to back them up. As a matter of fact, the more I stay in Washington, the more I realize that sometimes the very ability to hold strong opinions depends upon being able to be deaf to the facts. [Laughter] That's why I am very, very pleased that the Council of Economic Advisers, under the leadership of Janet Yellen and Rebecca Blank, has produced a book, "Changing America: Indicators of Social and Economic Well-Being by Race and Hispanic Origin." And I commend it to all of you. It's also not too big. [Laughter] You can digest it with some level of comfort. But it's a good piece of work. This book will help us to understand how far we have come and what we still need to do in our efforts to extend opportunity to all our people.

Finally, we here in Washington have to act. We have put forward in this administration and within our balanced budget a comprehensive agenda to expand opportunity for all Americans in economic development, education, health care, housing, crime, credit, and civil rights enforcement. Again, I thank the Cabinet for their leadership on these fronts.

Just today, Small Business Administrator Aida Alvarez launched two major initiatives to streamline the application process for loans guaranteed by the SBA for less than \$150,000, to make this credit available on more flexible terms. The size and kind of financing many minority- and women-owned businesses so desperately need, as well as many other people in inner-city and rural areas where the unemployment rate is still high. Through these efforts, we estimate more than one billion dollars in loans will be available to help businesses expand and create new jobs. We have to make this opportunity available for more Americans.

I also would like to say I am still hoping that in this budget fight in the next few weeks, we can pass the economic opportunity agenda put forward by Secretary Cuomo and the Vice President to provide more community development banks, more job-creating initiatives in the inner cities and the isolated rural areas where the economic recovery has not yet hit.

Second—[applause]—thank you. Every place we went, from north to south to east to west, all the people with whom we talked recognized that in the future education will be even more central to equality than it has been in the past. We have to do a great deal to set high standards and increase accountability, to eliminate the gaps and resources and achievement between the races, to give our children the opportunity to attend schools where diversity will help to prepare them for the world in which they will live. We know too many schools are not as good as they should be. We know too many students still are caught in a web of low expectations, low standards, poor teaching, crowded classrooms.

The budget that I have sent to Congress proposes new education opportunity zones to reward poor school districts that follow Chicago's lead and introduce sweeping reforms, to close down failing schools, promote public school choice, eliminate social promotion but make sure students get the summer school and after-school help they need. Today, the summer school in Chicago—the summer school—is the sixth biggest school district in the United States, and over 40,000 kids are getting three square meals a day there. So

it's fine to say no more social promotion, if you give children the chance to learn and grow and do to the best of their ability. [Applause] Thank you.

I am also committed to providing 35,000 new scholarships to young people who will agree to become certified teachers and then teach in our neediest areas.

Finally, I think it is very important to fund our initiative to provide 100,000 teachers to lower the average class size to 18 in the early grades. It is clear from all the research that children who come from the most disadvantaged backgrounds are most likely to have permanent learning gains when small classes are provided so they can get individualized instruction in the early grades. And I think it is very important.

Today the House rejected that idea and instead passed a block grant proposal that would eliminate accountability, reject the idea of national responsibility for helping communities to raise standards, improve teaching, or bring the benefits of technology to our students. I also believe we have to pass this proposal to connect every classroom and library to the Internet by the year 2000. Otherwise, the poor kids will be left further behind.

Now, I think we should be doing more in education, not less. Governor Kean said to me today, he said, "I like this proposal to build or repair 5,000 schools. The problem is it's way too small. You should be doing more." So that voice coming from a distinguished Republican former Governor, I hope will echo loudly on Capitol Hill today. [Laughter]

We have a lot to do here. We have a lot to do in the country. We've got to keep the connection between what we do here and what we do in the country, and that is a lot of what this board has recommended. So even though the work of the board is over, they have given us a continuing mission.

I will say again: If you look at the life of Rosa Parks, if you read the book that John Lewis has just produced about his life, if you consider the sacrifice of two people who—one just came to visit me—Václav Havel, the President of the Czech Republic, and one will be with us in a few days, Nelson Mandela, if you look at all this, you see that

a people's greatness only comes when everybody has a chance to be great. And it comes from, yes, opportunity. It comes from, yes, learning. It comes from, yes, the absence of discrimination. But it also has to come from the presence of reconciliation, from a turning away from the madness that life only matters if there is someone we can demean, destroy, or put down. That is the eternal lesson of America.

We are now given a future of incomparable, kaleidoscopic possibility and diversity. And somehow we have to implant in the soul of every child that age-old seed of learning so that the future can be ours.

Thank you all. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:40 p.m. in Room 450 of the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Mayor Dennis W. Archer of Detroit, MI; Mayor Wellington Webb of Denver, CO; Mayor Gordon Bush of East St. Louis, IL; Mayor Elizabeth G. Flores of Laredo, TX; Gov. Mary Thomas of the Gila River Indian Community; President's Advisory Board on Race Chairman John Hope Franklin, members Suzan D. Johnson Cook, Angela E. Oh, Robert Thomas, Linda Chavez-Thompson, former Gov. William F. Winter of Minnesota, and former Gov. Thomas H. Kean of New Jersey, consultants Laura Harris and Christopher Edley, and Executive Director Judith A. Winston. These remarks were not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Remarks at the White House Millennium Lecture With Jazz Musicians

September 18, 1998

[The opening remarks by the First Lady and the President were made in a video presentation to the audience.]

The First Lady. Good evening and welcome to the White House. The theme we have chosen for the millennium is "Honor the Past, Imagine the Future." This lecture continues a series of millennium evenings with scholars, scientists and other creative individuals which we are holding to commemorate and celebrate this milestone.

The President. With the millennium, we must now decide how to think about our commitment to the future. Thomas Paine

said, a long time ago, "We have it in our power to begin the world over again." We have always believed that in this country, and we must now take it upon ourselves to take stock as we approach this new millennium to commit ourselves to begin the world over again for our children, our children's children, for people who will live in a new century.

It is to the people of that new century that we must all offer our very best gifts. It is for them that we will celebrate the millennium.

[The video presentation concluded, and the First Lady then made brief remarks.]

The President. Thank you very much. Ladies and gentlemen, I want to join Hillary in welcoming all our musicians here tonight and all the jazz fans. I thank, in particular, President Havel and Mrs. Havel for being here. When I was in Prague, the President took me to a jazz club, gave me a saxophone he had personally inscribed, and provided me with a band that covered my sins. *[Laughter]* And then he accompanied me on the tambourine, made a CD of it, and sent it to me, so I'm actually a recording artist—*[laughter]*—thanks only to Václav Havel. I also want to thank the First Lady for having the idea for these millennium evenings and for agreeing eagerly to my entreaty that at least one of them ought to be devoted to this unique American contribution to the creativity of the world.

A little more than a century ago, a famous composer arrived on our shores and was amazed by what he heard: African-American music, blues and spirituals, street songs and work songs. It was unlike anything he had heard in Europe or, in fact, anywhere else in the world. After hearing these new, uniquely American sounds, he wrote: "America can have her own music, a fine music, growing up from her soil and having its own special character. The natural voice of a free and great nation." Those words were written by the great Czech composer Antonin Dvorak in 1892. It is especially fitting, therefore, that we have a worthy successor of Czech greatness in the President of the Czech Republic here with us tonight.